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WASHINGTON, DC- U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon introduced two bills today to help south Louisiana's education system recover from Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. The Revitalizing New Orleans by Attracting America's Leaders (RENEWAAL) Act of 2007 was introduced by Rep. Melancon, Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, and Rep. William Jefferson (D-LA). The RENEWALL Act addresses the severe teacher shortage in schools in south Louisiana and other hurricane-affected communities and will help them pay off debt and meet other challenges they've faced in the year and a half since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the Gulf Coast.

"Teachers and administrators across the Gulf Coast have performed heroically in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita," said Rep. Melancon. "So many have worked tirelessly, under extremely difficult conditions, to get their schools up and running so families can return home and begin rebuilding their lives. Good schools are part of the bedrock of our communities and the RENEWAAL Act will give these dedicated educators a helping hand in recruiting and retaining top quality teachers and principals. I am proud to join Chairman Miller and Rep. Jefferson in introducing this important legislation that will help our entire education system recover from the hurricanes and return to some degree of normalcy."

Chairman Miller added, "For a year and a half, schools in New Orleans and its surrounding parishes have waited in vain for much of the help they need to get back to the business of educating the thousands of students returning to the area with their families. We should not only get schools these resources, but also help them to become models for other schools around the country."

The RENEWAAL Act provides incentives to qualified educators and principals that stay in or return to hurricane-impacted public schools and commit to work there for at least three years. Highly qualified teachers could receive an annual bonus of up to \$10,000, while principals who have a demonstrated track record of success with improving urban schools could qualify for a bonus of up to \$16,500 a year. The bill would also assist these educators with a relocation bonus (\$2,500), housing grants (\$500 a month) and student loan forgiveness (up to \$7,000 a year).

In addition, higher education institutions that are still struggling with the aftermath of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina would receive help in recruiting and retaining faculty and students. Universities that were closed for 30 days or more and continue to sustain lost revenue and enrollment would receive payments to help with faculty salaries and incentives for retaining faculty. Also, students that choose to attend these institutions may be eligible for grants.

Rep. Melancon also introduced legislation (H.R. 1262) to extend a federal waiver that gives school districts impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita more flexibility in drawing down and utilizing federal money for recovery efforts. Last fall, Rep. Melancon was an original co-sponsor of successful legislation that extended the waiver until September 30th, 2007. Today's bill will extend the waiver for one more year, until September 30th, 2008.

"Extending this waiver will give schools the flexibility they need to make the most of their rebuilding funding," said Rep. Melancon. "Schools across the Gulf Coast are struggling every day to recover, and they don't need bureaucratic hurdles slowing them down. This waiver cuts the red tape so schools in communities devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita can continue their efforts to rebuild and help students and teachers return to the classroom."

The legislation will allow schools to continue to use state money for the 10% local match required by FEMA in order for them to be eligible for the 90% federal reimbursement for recovery projects. The bill will also allow school districts to use federal funds appropriated by Congress in the Defense/Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill (H.R. 2863) to pay for expenses state money would normally be used for, such as teachers' salaries and school operational needs.

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